



**SENATOR JAY ROCKEFELLER ON RECEIVING THE GRAND
CORDON ORDER OF THE RISING SUN**

Wednesday, February 12, 2014

(Remarks as prepared for delivery)

I extend my deepest appreciation and gratitude to Emperor Akihito for extending the Grand Cordon Order of the Rising Sun to me. I am deeply honored to receive this recognition.

Ambassador Sasae, thank you for opening your home tonight for this ceremony. I want to thank my family for being here – Sharon, John, Valerie and Steve, Charles and Justin.

I also welcome so many friends, colleagues, and distinguished guests. I am deeply moved by your presence tonight. Some of you have traveled a great distance to be here. I am enormously appreciative of your support.

In a vastly unstable and increasingly dangerous world, the United States has no more important friend and ally than Japan. Our deep ties have created peace, and prosperity, for both of our countries. Ours is a classically stable relationship. It is based on more than 60 years of working together, to advance our deeply intertwined economic, and political, interests.

We have enjoyed a deep friendship rooted in our mutual values, like service and dedication to our family and country. The relationship has been cemented through trust and genuine affection for each other, our histories, and our culture.

I have been honored to be part of the process of building up our ties for more than 50 years. And, I am especially proud of the strong and lasting relationship between Japan and West Virginia, which so many of you here have been instrumental in achieving.

The bridge for me between Japan and the United States is not just a broad commercial and political one. It is deeply personal. I owe much to the people of Japan.

My three years as a Japanese language student at the International Christian University, in Tokyo, had a profound and lasting impact on me. In many ways, I came of age in post-war

Japan. It set me on a course that ultimately led me to West Virginia, and a commitment to improving the lives of others.

My own relationship with Japan and the Japanese people first began in 1957, when I decided to make a change in my life. I wanted to challenge myself more meaningfully than Harvard would let me, and I knew that involved changing the order and rhythm of my life. My experiences ended up changing my life dramatically, and in so many positive ways.

When I arrived in Japan to study the Japanese language and their culture, I was welcomed warmly and openly by the Japanese people. I discovered that I identified with the Japanese culture, and the structured lifestyle they lead; and I was struck by the work ethic and resilience of the people around me. It was unlike anything I had ever seen.

These were important impressions that many years later guided my work, and vision, in fostering an economic relationship between Japan and West Virginia – a relationship that most people might have found unlikely. For me, my bedrock comfort in working with the Japanese people has never wavered.

After I finished my studies and returned to the United States, Japan, its people, and my friends were never very far from my mind.

Over the next several decades, Japan would emerge from the aftermath of World War II to become a global economic superpower. I would find a home in West Virginia, and a calling to public service. Our nation and state was going through its own tumultuous times – with our post-war prosperity giving way to deep social and economic change.

In the 1980's, bashing Japan was in vogue in this country. We let our fear of economic decline cloud the real potential that strong economic, cultural, and political ties would make us stronger, and therefore, better prepared to compete in the global economy.

Because I appreciated the core connections between West Virginians and the Japanese, when I became Governor of West Virginia, I wanted to build an economic and cultural relationship between Japanese businesses, the people of Japan, and the people of West Virginia.

I wanted to open up West Virginia to the world. I knew a relationship with the Japanese would launch West Virginia on a global scale like no other country could.

The strong cultural similarities between the Japanese, and the people of West Virginia, had become so apparent to me. They're rooted in their land. They're hard-working. Their histories

are filled with stories about overcoming adversity. I thought these similarities would help us truly relate to one another.

In friendships and business relationships, trust and respect are of the utmost importance to the Japanese. So too, for the people of West Virginia. The Japanese are honorable and that makes them strong partners. You can depend on them even in the most difficult times – just as you can always count on West Virginians.

And so, the West Virginia-Japan relationship began. I knew we would accomplish big things together, but we had to be strategic about reaching this goal.

This was the 1970s, and while all other U.S. states were opening their Japan offices in Tokyo, we did something different. We opened West Virginia's state office in Nagoya, right in the hub of Japanese manufacturing.

In 1978, I made the first attempt to forge a partnership between a Japanese company, Nisshin Steel of Japan, and a West Virginia company, Wheeling-Pittsburgh Steel. In 1986, this created Wheeling-Nisshin in the Northern Panhandle. It was the first Japanese investment in the state, and the first joint venture between private businesses based in Japan and West Virginia.

In April 1994, NGK Spark Plugs opened its doors in our state. NGK offered the type of highly advanced manufacturing jobs we needed to grow and diversify our state's economy. NGK also helped lay the foundation for another major economic investment from Japan.

Ten years after Wheeling-Nisshin, the highly respected international corporation, Toyota Motor Corporation, established its presence in West Virginia. We really had to work hard to land such a prestigious company. And we did.

Our venture resulted in an initial investment of \$400 million dollars, and the creation of 350 jobs at Toyota in Putnam County. Toyota has expanded its plant eight times. Toyota has invested more than \$1.4 billion dollars in West Virginia's economy, and provided at least 1,300 jobs. It is the second largest industrial investment in West Virginia by any corporation in the last 50 years. The relationship between Japan and West Virginia has created such positive change in our state.

We have worked hard with Japan, and the results speak for themselves. The relationship has created 3,000 good paying jobs, at 22 West Virginia-based Japanese companies.

Our relationship has also boosted the psyche of West Virginians, because we have shown that it is possible for the state to compete, and win, on a global scale. We successfully blended our cultures, and proved to the world the importance of the Japan-U.S. relationship.

I am so deeply proud of all we have accomplished, but I know there is still more we can do together. And, we will.

The future holds so much potential for the special relationship between West Virginia and Japan. I know Toyota will continue to grow stronger in America, and companies newer to this international economic partnership, like Kureha, and Nippon Thermostat, will benefit from the ongoing and maturing relationship between our two nations.

Tonight is so deeply meaningful to me because it showcases all we have accomplished together. It is also a celebration of my abiding admiration for the Japanese people and culture. This evening allows me to share, in a very personal way, how this country profoundly helped changed the trajectory of my life.

This occasion is among the greatest honors of my life. I am eternally grateful to have been recognized by the Emperor. I will write his Majesty a letter to express my profound appreciation for this honor.

I look forward to a bright future for Japan and West Virginia, and I promise I will continue to work to make it so.

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